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Exploring Residential Mobility among Low-Income Families

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ABSTRACT While it is widely recognized that low-income families move frequently, the complexities of such transitions are not well understood. This article uses panel data from the Women's Employment Study to examine the patterns and correlates of different forms of mobility among one sample of low-income mothers in the years following welfare reform. The analysis reveals considerable heterogeneity between movers and nonmovers and, to a lesser extent, between those who experience positive and negative moves. Most families experience positive residential transitions, yet nearly a quarter of movers are dissatisfied with their housing circumstances following a move. Multivariate analyses show that being African American, experiencing a job loss, and reporting hard drug use significantly increase the probability of experiencing negative mobility, while having a physical health problem increases the probability of dissatisfaction in the absence of mobility.

Residential mobility is common in the United States, where nearly half the population moves over a 5-year period (Berkner and Faber 2003; Ihrke, Faber, and Koerber 2011). Most moves are voluntary, reflecting transitions into more affordable or better-quality housing, changes in household size, or relocation for employment. Other moves are involuntary, resulting from eviction, foreclosure, or destruction of a housing unit or property (Clark and Onaka 1983). Although mobility is common across the economic spectrum, low-income households move more frequently than other households, and they are more likely to experience negative mobility in the form of evictions and homeless episodes (Hartman and Robinson 2003; Nichols and Gault 2003).

While it is widely recognized that low-income households move frequently, the complexities of residential transitions are not well understood. For example, it is not clear whether mobility, defined as any change in residence over a given period of time, reflects a voluntary and positive transition for most poor families or a forced and involuntary transition. Among

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the general population, most moves represent a decision to improve housing or neighborhood quality or to move closer to friends or family (Schachter 2001). Yet low-income families have fewer resources than other families and are more likely to experience problems related to employment, health, and housing (Mayer and Jencks 1989; Danziger, Kalil, and Anderson 2000; Johnson and Corcoran 2003; Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University 2011). These problems may increase the incidence of housing instability, which is mobility that is forced or involuntary. For instance, unstable or low-wage work might increase the risk that a family will experience an eviction.

Similarly, it is unclear whether the absence of mobility reflects contentment with existing housing circumstances or constraints on the ability to improve existing housing and neighborhood circumstances by moving. Mobility scholars have theorized that for most nonmovers a lack of mobility reflects a satisfactory fit between housing needs and circumstances (Speare 1974; Landale and Guest 1985; South and Deane 1993). Yet the same problems that leave low-income families vulnerable to negative mobility may act as constraints on positive forms of mobility. For example, individuals in low-wage jobs may have few financial resources available for moving out of poor-quality housing units or neighborhoods.

Because residential mobility has consequences for parent and child well-being, this lack of knowledge about the prevalence and correlates of different forms of residential mobility represents a gap in the literature. Voluntary mobility into higher-quality neighborhoods or housing units can lead to improvements in neighborhood safety and positive changes in physical and mental health for movers (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2003; Sanbonmatsu et al. 2011). For families that are able to remain in high-quality housing and neighborhoods, such benefits may persist over time. In contrast, unstable or frequent mobility can disrupt employment and social networks and may interfere with children's educational achievement and emotional well-being (Astone and McClanahan 1994; Pribesh and Downey 1999; Crowley 2003; Harkness and Newman 2005). In addition, families that are constrained in their mobility may be forced to remain in poor-quality housing or unsafe neighborhoods.

To provide insight into the patterns and correlates of residential mobility among low-income families, this article explores mobility among one sample of families in the years following the 1996 passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The ar-

ticle examines the extent and frequency of different types of mobility, using panel data from the five-wave Women's Employment Study (WES), and it categorizes housing circumstances as either positive or negative, using sample members' own subjective assessments. The study analyzes how life-cycle and demographic characteristics, personal problems, and housing problems are related to mobility and how experiences of housing instability (e.g., evictions and homeless episodes) and transitions between renting and owning differ for women who viewed their circumstances following the move, or nonmove, as positive versus negative.

The analysis contributes to a growing body of research that explores different types of residential transitions among low-income families. It provides descriptive information about the extent of positive and negative mobility and helps to identify the characteristics and experiences that distinguish different groups of movers and nonmovers. By focusing on current and former welfare recipients, the analysis also provides insight into the well-being of families in the postwelfare reform era. While many scholars have examined the economic and material well-being of low-income families in the years since PRWORA's passage, few have focused on residential mobility as an indicator of families' well-being.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Low-income populations consistently report higher rates of residential mobility than other populations (Coulton, Theodos, and Turner 2009; Ihrke and Faber 2012). While approximately 10 percent of Americans moved between 2011 and 2012, the comparable percentage for those living in poverty was above 20 percent (Ihrke and Faber 2012). The mobility rate is particularly high for low-income families with children who receive cash welfare benefits through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the public assistance program created under the PRWORA. One study of current and former welfare recipients in Connecticut finds that 65 percent of study members moved in the 3 years following PRWORA's passage (Bloom et al. 2002), and a similar study conducted in Florida finds that over 70 percent of study members moved over a comparable period (Bloom et al. 2000).

Recently scholars have begun to analyze variation in the mobility of low-income populations. Claudia Coulton and colleagues (2009, 2012) investigate the complexities of residential mobility using data from the 10-city "Making Connections" initiative, a decade-long project of the Annie E. Casey Foun-

dation focused on improving outcomes for disadvantaged families. Dividing a population of low-income households into clusters based on an analysis of individual, housing, and neighborhood characteristics reveals considerable heterogeneity among low-income families that move (Coulton et al. 2009, 2012). Approximately 30 percent of families in this study are categorized as “up and out movers” (Coulton et al. 2012, 70). These movers are younger, have higher relative incomes, and move longer distances into higher-quality neighborhoods than other clusters. A second cluster of movers, called “nearby attached movers” (70), represent 24 percent of movers and are middle-aged households that move shorter distances than other clusters with minimal changes in housing or neighborhood quality. “Churning movers” (69) constitute the final 46 percent of the sample. These young households have the lowest incomes relative to other clusters of movers, and they experience few changes in quality following a move. While the first two clusters appear to represent positive transitions, the third cluster likely includes moves that are perceived by families as negative or motivated by financial or housing problems (Coulton et al. 2009, 2012).

The Making Connections study also provides evidence of heterogeneity among nonmovers. Nearly half of low-income households that do not move are categorized as “positive stayers” through cluster analysis (Coulton et al. 2012, 73). Relative to other clusters of nonmoving households, positive stayers are more likely to include working adults and to report higher incomes. Most are homeowners and report high levels of neighborhood quality and engagement. Thirty-one percent of nonmoving households are categorized as “long-term older stayers” (73). Compared to other nonmoving households, households within this cluster are older and have lower incomes, but few report housing affordability problems or neighborhood quality problems. Finally, approximately 22 percent of nonmoving households are categorized as “dissatisfied stayers” (72). Dissatisfied stayers are younger than other nonmoving households; they report difficulty paying housing costs, and they are the least satisfied with their housing and neighborhood circumstances (Coulton et al. 2012). This suggests that for a substantial minority of nonmoving households, residential stability may reflect constraints on mobility rather than satisfaction with current residence.

The high percentages of churning movers and dissatisfied stayers in the Making Connections study suggest that negative forms of mobility may be more common than previous research indicates. Studies that examine the incidence of evictions or homelessness, for example, typically find that less

than 10 percent of low-income families experience this type of mobility (Bloom et al. 2000, 2002; Acs and Loprest 2004; Wood and Rangarajan 2004), though between 12 and 20 percent experience an eviction or homeless episode over time (Phinney et al. 2007). While recent research draws attention to different forms of residential mobility in low-income communities, few studies explore these complexities in depth. As a result, little is known about the individual- and household-level factors that distinguish low-income households that experience positive forms of mobility from those that experience negative forms of mobility, or the factors that distinguish dissatisfied nonmovers from other nonmoving households. Previous research on residential mobility provides some guidance regarding the factors that are likely to affect voluntary forms of mobility, as well as those that place families at risk for experiencing negative moves, such as moves associated with evictions or homeless episodes. This research draws attention to the ways in which life-cycle and demographic characteristics, personal and household problems, and housing and neighborhood problems shape both positive and negative residential transitions.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND LIFE-CYCLE CHARACTERISTICS

Individual demographic characteristics, particularly those related to the life cycle, are consistently associated with mobility in past research. Scholars theorize that characteristics such as age, race, marital status, and household size influence mobility indirectly through their effect on household resources and residential satisfaction (Rossi 1955; Speare 1974; Speare, Goldstein, and Frey 1975; Newman and Duncan 1979; Landale and Guest 1985). Residential satisfaction refers to the fit between a household and its housing circumstances. When this fit changes, often due to events associated with the life cycle, families are more likely to consider moving and more likely to move.

Young adults, for example, are more likely than older adults to experience mobility (Thrke and Fader 2012). Young adults engage in many activities that necessitate voluntary residential transitions, such as leaving home to attend college, getting married, and having children. Yet young adults are also vulnerable to involuntary moves because they are less likely to have savings or wealth, which can protect against residential instability during times of economic hardship. Racial minorities, too, move at higher rates than other Americans, and they are more likely than other Americans to experi-

ence negative moves, such as those resulting in homelessness (Sommer 2001; Ihrke and Faber 2012). Racial differences also exist with respect to savings and wealth (Massey and Denton 1993), which may increase the risk of housing instability. Race may also directly influence mobility because racial discrimination in the housing market can limit the availability of housing (Yinger 2001). Scott J. South and Glenn D. Deane (1993), for instance, show that African American households are less likely to move than white households, despite having similar levels of neighborhood dissatisfaction, suggesting that racial minorities may face barriers to voluntary mobility that other households do not face.

Among the general population, movers have smaller households than nonmovers and are less likely than nonmovers to be married or cohabiting (Ihrke, Faber, and Koerber 2011). Lower rates of mobility among larger families may reflect the stronger attachment that such families have with their housing and neighborhoods or the constraints that such families face in the housing market. In addition to indirectly influencing mobility through residential satisfaction, household size may have a direct effect on mobility because larger families may have fewer available housing options (Long 1972; Kleit and Manzo 2006). Families are also underrepresented among those experiencing negative forms of mobility, such as homeless episodes (Burt et al. 2001). Because marriage often reflects a stable living arrangement, those who are married may have less need or desire to move. Marriage may also protect against involuntary forms of mobility because two-parent families have more economic resources than single-parent families (Blank 1997). When cohabitation reflects a stable relationship, it may depress voluntary mobility just as marriage does. Yet research suggests that cohabitation is less stable than marriage (Bumpass and Sweet 1989; Smock 2000), and women who are cohabitating may be more likely than married women to experience a move due to a relationship ending.

CONSTRAINTS AND RISK FACTORS

In addition to life-cycle and demographic characteristics, personal problems can act as a constraint on positive moves or they can increase the risk of negative or forced moves. Moving requires resources, information, and ability, and households with fewer resources, incomplete information, and limited ability may be unable to act on a preference to move (Landale and Guest 1985). At the same time, characteristics that constrain positive forms of mo-

bility may increase the risk of negative mobility either directly or by depleting resources that protect against housing instability.

Employment may be associated with increased rates of mobility, as those who work steadily and save earnings have more resources available to act on a desire to move. In contrast, limited or unstable work may prevent voluntary moves and place families at greater risk for experiencing various forms of housing instability (Puckett, Renner, and Slack 2002). Nancy S. Landale and Avery M. Guest (1985) theorize that home ownership acts as a constraint on voluntary mobility because it reflects investment made at a current residence. Home ownership may also protect against housing instability by serving as a source of wealth or savings.

Government housing assistance, available in the form of public housing, publicly assisted housing, and tenant-based assistance, can enable positive forms of mobility while reducing the likelihood of housing instability (Orr et al. 2003; Feins and Patterson 2005; Kleit and Manzo 2006; Wood, Turnham, and Mills 2008; Sanbonmatsu et al. 2011). Housing assistance can lead to voluntary mobility by increasing the accessibility and affordability of more desirable housing (Orr et al. 2003; Wood et al. 2008). Vouchers and other forms of assisted housing may also decrease the incidence of housing instability by keeping housing affordable.¹

Mobility requires potential movers to gather information about the private housing market or housing assistance programs (Popkin and Cunningham 2002). Individuals with low educational achievement or limited work skills may face difficulty locating available units in the private market or they may be unaware of private or public programs that help households identify or secure new housing arrangements. These barriers may also limit an individual's ability to access the information or resources necessary to prevent an eviction, and they have been associated with housing instability in previous research (Phinney et al. 2007).

In addition, movers must be physically and mentally able to engage in what is often a highly stressful and physically challenging activity. Health

1. In an analysis of the experimental Effects of Housing Vouchers on Welfare Families program, Michelle Wood, Jennifer Turnham, and Gregory Mills (2008) find that vouchers facilitated initial mobility for program participants and reduced the incidence of doubling-up by 69 percent and the extent of homelessness by 74 percent. Research also shows that poor families that receive housing assistance are much less likely to experience homelessness or to double-up with relatives or friends (Shinn et al. 1998; Metraux and Culhane 1999; Stojanovic et al. 1999; Zlotnick, Robertson, and Lahiff 1999; Wood and Rangarajan 2004; Wood et al. 2008).

problems and substance abuse can therefore act as a constraint on mobility, particularly for those with more acute problems (Popkin and Cunningham 2002; Popkin, Cunningham, and Burt 2005). Mental and physical health problems and substance abuse are more common among those experiencing homelessness (Wright and Weber 1987; Bassuck et al. 1998; Burt et al. 2001), and they are associated with increased risk of housing-related hardship among low-income families (Phinney et al. 2007; Sullivan, Turner, and Danziger 2008). Such problems can influence involuntary mobility indirectly by depleting the economic resources of a household, particularly for individuals who lack health insurance. Individuals with severe mental illness or substance abuse may also be vulnerable to housing instability if their illness or substance use leads to interpersonal problems with other household members, the landlord, or other tenants (Mojtabai 2005).

Finally, domestic violence can constrain voluntary moves while increasing the risk of involuntary moves. Individuals who experience violence may find themselves without a credit history and landlord references and may have limited economic resources as a result of their experience with domestic violence (Pearce 1999; Menard 2001). Research also suggests that those who experience violence are vulnerable to eviction if their partner's violence is directed toward a landlord or other tenants (Menard 2001).

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

Housing and neighborhood problems factor prominently into self-reported reasons for mobility (Schachter 2001). Low-income populations often have trouble finding affordable housing, and problems with affordability are cited by movers as motivating voluntary and involuntary moves (Burt et al. 2001; Acs and Loprest 2004). Affordability problems may lead to mobility if households decide to move to reduce housing expenses. At the same time, such problems may lead to evictions or the need to double up to share expenses. Families experiencing physical housing problems, such as a lack of heat or inadequate plumbing, or problems with neighborhood safety may elect to move to improve housing and neighborhood conditions. Such problems may also increase the likelihood of forced mobility if housing is condemned or destroyed. Some research suggests that among the general population, housing problems do not directly affect mobility, although they are associated with residential satisfaction (Newman and Duncan 1979). Yet, for low-income families, housing and neighborhood problems may have

more of a direct effect on mobility because housing and neighborhood problems are more pronounced in low-income communities (US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2003).

CONTRIBUTION OF THE CURRENT STUDY

This article expands existing research in several ways. First, whereas previous research either does not distinguish between positive and negative forms of mobility or focuses on a single type of mobility, this study analyzes the incidence of both positive and negative moves among one sample of low-income families. By comparing the characteristics of different groups of movers, it is possible to examine heterogeneity between nonmovers and movers, as well as between positive and negative nonmovers and movers. Using respondents' subjective assessments of their housing circumstances in order to categorize mobility as positive or negative complements prior research that categorizes moves solely on the basis of type (e.g., a move preceded by an eviction or a move into a better-quality neighborhood).

Second, because the WES data contain detailed measures of employment, individual attributes, personal and household problems, and housing and neighborhood conditions, this study is able to explore relationships between preexisting personal and household problems and positive and negative forms of mobility. Many of the measures in the WES, including those related to health and other household problems, are unavailable in larger, nationally representative projects. The longitudinal nature of the data permits an analysis of whether problems that occur prior to a move are associated with subsequent experiences of mobility.

Third, by including homeowners as well as renters, the data provide a broader snapshot of residential mobility among low-income families. Existing research on mobility in low-income communities tends to focus on renters (Wood et al. 2008; Sanbonmatsu et al. 2011), and few studies include homeowners. While most poor families rent rather than own their home, rates of homeownership among low-income families have increased in recent years. Thirty-four percent of households in the lowest income quintile owned their home in 1994; by 2006, the rate of homeownership had increased to 38 percent (Bostic and Lee 2007). Because homeowners are less likely to move than renters, studies that exclude homeowners may overstate the extent of mobility within low-income communities, particularly

in areas where home ownership is more common. Including homeowners therefore offers a more complete description of mobility within low-income communities.

Finally, this article draws attention to an important indicator of family well-being that is underexplored within the literature on families after welfare reform. Existing research on family well-being after welfare reform typically focuses on economic or employment-related indicators, such as household income, receipt of public assistance, or levels of work activity (see Danziger et al. 2000; Lichter and Jayakody 2002). Few studies explore mobility as an indicator of family well-being. By examining the mobility patterns of WES respondents, this article aims to provide insight on how families fared in the early years following welfare reform with respect to their housing and mobility circumstances.

DATA, MEASURES, AND METHODS

The data used in this analysis are drawn from the Women's Employment Study, a panel study of low-income mothers who were interviewed five times in the 6 years following welfare reform. The initial WES sample consists of 874 women who received cash welfare in one urban Michigan county in February 1997, 6 months after welfare reform was passed. Sample members were selected with equal probability from an ordered list of white and African American, single, female heads of household between the ages of 18 and 54 who received welfare benefits. Trained interviewers conducted in-person interviews ranging from 1 to 1.5 hours with these women in the fall of 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001, and 2003. Response rates at the five waves were 86 percent ($N = 753$), 92 percent ($N = 693$), 91 percent ($N = 632$), 91 percent ($N = 577$), and 93 percent ($N = 536$), respectively.² This analysis pools data from the fourth and fifth survey years to produce an unbalanced panel of 1,111 observations. The pooled data set includes 576 observations from the 2001 survey year and 535 observations from the 2003 survey year.³ Observations from the first 3 survey years

2. Brian Cadena and Andreas Pape (2006) analyze attrition in WES and conclude that there is little evidence that attrition from the sample was nonrandom. As a result, sample weights are not used in analyses of WES data.

3. Two observations (one from 2001 and one from 2003) are excluded because information on satisfaction with current housing conditions is missing.

were not included in the pooled data set because a small number of independent variables were not available in the first years of data collection.⁴

The first part of the analysis examines the incidence of positive and negative mobility among WES respondents and compares groups of non-movers and movers with respect to life-stage and demographic characteristics such as age and race, individual and household problems, and housing and neighborhood problems. In addition to descriptive comparisons, this section of the analysis uses multinomial logistic regression to estimate independent relationships between positive and negative mobility and the set of independent variables. Regression models use robust standard errors to adjust for the fact that each sample member contributes multiple observations to the pooled data set (see Allison 1999). Because the coefficients do not reveal the magnitude of the relationship between independent and dependent variables, the analysis calculates predicted probabilities to show how each statistically significant independent variable affects the likelihood of different types of mobility.

The dependent variable is constructed from two survey questions. The first survey question asks, "Have you moved since [previous interview date]?" and the second question asks, "How satisfied are you with your current housing situation: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?" Respondents are grouped into four categories: those who moved and reported satisfaction following a move (satisfied movers), those who moved and reported dissatisfaction with their housing circumstances following a move (dissatisfied movers), those who did not move and reported satisfaction with their current housing circumstances (satisfied stayers), and those who did not move between survey years and reported dissatisfaction with their housing circumstances in the current survey year (dissatisfied stayers).⁵

While the dependent variable is measured in the current survey year, many independent variables are drawn from earlier survey years. The

4. Specifically, the 1997 and 1998 survey years did not ask respondents to report on housing and neighborhood conditions. As a result, it is not possible to obtain lagged measures of housing and neighborhood conditions for the 1998 or 1999 survey years. Observations from the 1997 survey year are not included because it is not possible to lag independent variables for the first survey year.

5. Respondents are coded as "satisfied" if they report being "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with housing and "dissatisfied" if they report being "very dissatisfied" or "somewhat dissatisfied" with housing.

majority of independent variables capturing life-cycle and neighborhood circumstances are drawn from the survey wave conducted just prior to observing a move or nonmove in order to assess how characteristics and circumstances experienced at a prior point in time are associated with moving or staying in place. For example, marriage and cohabitation, health problems and drug use, and housing and neighborhood problems are all drawn from the prior survey year. A small number of variables (percentage of months worked between years, job loss, and domestic violence) are measured in the current year but assess the period of time between survey years. For example, the percentage of months worked variable calculates the percentage of months that a respondent was employed between the prior survey year and the current survey year.

Race, low educational attainment, and human capital barriers are measured in the first year of data collection (1997). To help control for unmeasured characteristics that may affect positive and negative mobility as well as personal and household characteristics, the analysis includes a control for housing dissatisfaction prior to any moves within the survey years. This variable is drawn from the third year of data collection (1999).⁶ Appendix table A1 provides information on the dependent and independent variables used in the analysis.

The second part of the empirical analysis examines whether positive and negative movers differ with respect to their experiences of housing instability, transitions between renting and owning, and changes in housing satisfaction. In this analysis, housing instability refers to a type of mobility that is forced or involuntary in nature. Housing instability is measured as an eviction, homelessness, doubling-up to share expenses, or three or more moves between survey years.⁷ Respondents are coded as steady

6. The variable measuring prior housing dissatisfaction is drawn from the third rather than the first survey year because housing satisfaction was not assessed in the first survey year.

7. Research suggests that doubling-up often reflects an unstable housing situation and can precede homelessness (Wright et al. 1998). However, it is possible that for some WES respondents, doubling-up reflects a voluntary transition rather than a forced or involuntary transition. For example, a respondent may choose to move into the apartment of a friend or family member to help share expenses. Similarly, frequent mobility may not always reflect involuntary changes in residence. It is likely that these measures contain some respondents who do not experience their transition as involuntary, and therefore their inclusion in the data represents an overestimate of these forms of housing instability.

homeowners if they own their home in the survey year preceding a move or nonmove and in the current survey year and as steady renters if they rent their home in the prior and current survey years. Similarly, respondents are coded as having steady housing satisfaction if they report satisfaction with housing in the prior and current survey year and as having steady housing dissatisfaction if they report dissatisfaction with housing in the prior and current survey years.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

THE PREVALENCE AND CORRELATES OF MOBILITY

Table 1 shows the extent of residential mobility among Women's Employment Study respondents, and it compares how positive and negative nonmovers and movers differ with respect to life-cycle and demographic characteristics, personal and household problems, and housing and neighborhood problems. Significance levels refer to the statistically significant differences between all stayers and movers (cols. 2 and 3), satisfied and dissatisfied nonmovers (cols. 4 and 5), and dissatisfied and satisfied movers (cols. 6 and 7).

Table 1 shows that mobility is common for WES respondents. Approximately 45 percent of the respondents moved between survey years, a 2-year period, on average. Most nonmovers and movers are satisfied with their current housing circumstances. Approximately 77 percent of nonmovers report satisfaction with their current housing circumstances, while 23 percent of nonmovers report dissatisfaction. Among movers, 76 percent report housing satisfaction following a move, and 24 percent report dissatisfaction with housing following a move.

Table 1 also presents descriptive characteristics for the groups. The first column shows that in the previous survey year, the average WES respondent is 33 years old and African American and has two children. In the survey year preceding observation of a move/nonmove, 18 percent of the women are married, and 21 percent are cohabiting as unmarried partners. Respondents worked approximately 70 percent of the months across survey years, but they also experienced an array of work-related problems, including job loss (11 percent), low educational attainment (30 percent had less than a high school degree in 1997), and human capital barriers (26 percent reported low work experience or skills in 1997). In the prior year, most respondents rent rather than own their home, but a sizable minority is made up of homeowners (29 percent). Approximately 18 percent of women state

that they report their income each year to determine the cost of a rental unit, a variable that serves as a proxy for receipt of housing assistance in this analysis.⁸

Physical and mental health problems are common among WES respondents. In the previous survey year, 54 percent of respondents report physical limitations or poor physical health, and 33 percent meet the diagnostic screening criteria for major depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, social phobia, or generalized anxiety. A small percentage of respondents report hard drug use (3 percent) or domestic violence (13 percent). Sizable minorities experience housing problems in the prior year. Twenty-eight percent of respondents have a housing affordability problem, meaning that they pay more than 30 percent of income on rent. Thirty-eight percent report two or more problems with housing quality, and 20 percent report problems with neighborhood safety. Twenty-three percent experienced prior dissatisfaction with current housing circumstances.

The second and third columns of table 1 show that nonmovers differ from movers with respect to demographic and employment-related characteristics, housing tenure and assistance, mental health problems, and housing affordability. On average, movers are younger than stayers (32 years compared to 34 years, $p < .01$), and they are less likely to be married (15 percent of movers are married compared to 20 percent of stayers, $p < .05$). Movers are less advantaged than stayers with respect to employment and personal problems. Respondents who move are more likely than respondents who do not move to report job loss (13 percent compared to 10 percent, $p < .05$), low educational attainment (36 percent of movers compared to 26 percent of stayers, $p < .01$), and higher levels of mental health problems (38 percent of movers compared to 30 percent of stayers, $p < .01$), domestic violence

8. While an imperfect measure of housing assistance, this survey question shows the greatest correspondence with actual receipt of housing assistance in previous analysis using the WES data. Using data from the 1998 survey year, Mary Corcoran and Colleen Hefflin (2003) find that 118 WES renters state that they report their income to set the rent, while 373 renters state that they do not. Eighty-four percent of these responses ($N = 412$) matched HUD administrative records. Of the 118 WES renters who state that they report their income, 72 actually received housing assistance, and 46 did not, yielding a match rate of 61 percent. Given the importance of housing assistance in facilitating voluntary moves and protecting against housing instability, the measure is included in the analysis despite the fact that it imperfectly measures receipt of housing assistance. In the multivariate analysis, excluding the housing assistance variable does not significantly change the findings.

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Women's Employment Study Respondents in Prior Survey Year, by Category of Mover

	All (100%) (1)	All Stayers (55.1%) (2)	All Movers (44.9%) (3)	p-Level	Dissatisfied Stayers (23.4%) (4)	Satisfied Stayers (76.6%) (5)	p-Level	Dissatisfied Movers (23.7%) (6)	Satisfied Movers (76.4%) (7)	p-Level
Life-cycle and demographic characteristics:										
Age	33.1	34.2	31.9	***	33.2	34.5	*	31.3	32.0	**
African American (%)	55.0	54.9	55.1		56.6	54.4		63.6	52.5	
Married and living with spouse (%)	18.0	20.3	15.2	**	20.3	20.3		10.2	16.8	*
Cohabiting as unmarried partners (%)	20.7	20.6	20.8		18.9	21.1		25.4	19.4	
No. children in household	2.2	2.2	2.2		2.3	2.2		2.2	2.2	
Constraints and risk factors:										
Percent of months worked between survey years	69.6	69.7	69.4		67.9	70.3		66.6	70.3	
Job loss between survey years (%)	11.2	9.5	13.3	**	10.5	9.2		21.4	10.8	***
Low educational attainment (1997; %)	30.2	25.5	35.9	***	29.4	24.3		39.8	34.7	
Human capital barrier (1997; %)	26.3	25.6	27.2		28.0	24.8		33.1	25.3	*
Owned home (%)	29.0	38.6	17.0	***	32.2	40.5	*	18.6	16.5	

Received housing assistance (%)	17.9	19.8	15.6	*	21.0	19.4	16.4	15.3
Poor physical health (%)	53.7	54.4	52.8		65.0	51.2	55.9	51.9
Mental health problem (%)	33.2	29.7	37.5	***	38.5	27.1	39.8	36.8
Hard drug use (%)	3.0	2.6	3.4		4.2	2.1	7.6	2.1
Domestic violence (%)	12.9	9.2	17.4	***	13.3	7.9	23.7	15.5
Housing/neighborhood problems:								
Housing affordability problem (%)	27.8	25.1	31.0	**	25.5	25.0	31.0	31.1
Housing quality problem (%)	37.7	35.8	40.2		48.3	32.0	45.8	38.4
Unsafe neighborhood	20.3	19.1	21.7		26.1	17.1	23.7	21.1
Prior housing dissatisfaction (1999; %)	23.0	17.3	30.0	***	37.1	11.3	38.8	27.3
Months between survey years (%)	23.1	22.9	23.3	***	22.8	23.0	23.3	23.2
Observations	1,111	612	499		143	469	118	381

Source.—Women's Employment Study, 2001–3.

Note.—The *p*-values denote the significance of a difference of means test between stayers and movers (cols. 2 and 3), dissatisfied stayers and satisfied stayers (cols. 4 and 5), and dissatisfied movers and satisfied movers (cols. 6 and 7). In this table, independent variables that are measured in the first or third year of data collection contain 1997 or 1999 in the variable label, respectively, and variables that are measured in the current survey year and assess the period of time between the prior and current survey year contain the words "between survey years" in the variable label. All other independent variables are measured in the survey year immediately preceding a move.

* *p* < .10.

** *p* < .05.

*** *p* < .01.

(17 percent compared to 9 percent, $p < .01$), and housing affordability problems (31 percent compared to 25 percent, $p < .05$). Respondents who do not move, in contrast, have higher levels of homeownership and receipt of housing assistance: in the previous survey year, 39 percent of stayers owned their home compared to 17 percent of movers ($p < .01$), and 20 percent received housing assistance compared to 16 percent of movers ($p < .10$).

The fourth through seventh columns compare dissatisfied and satisfied stayers and then dissatisfied and satisfied movers. The fourth and fifth columns show that although dissatisfied stayers are slightly younger than satisfied stayers, both groups of stayers report similar rates of marriage and cohabitation, and they have comparable levels of work activity and job loss. While few differences emerge with respect to demographic and employment-related characteristics, large and statistically significant differences exist with respect to personal and housing problems. Dissatisfied stayers are more likely than satisfied stayers to experience health problems and domestic violence: nearly 65 percent of dissatisfied stayers report a physical health problem compared to 51 percent of satisfied stayers ($p < .01$), 39 percent report a mental health problem compared to 27 percent of satisfied stayers ($p < .01$), and 13 percent experience domestic violence compared to 8 percent of satisfied stayers ($p < .05$).

In addition, dissatisfied stayers report statistically significantly higher rates of housing quality problems (48 percent compared to 32 percent of satisfied stayers, $p < .01$), neighborhood safety problems (26 percent compared to 17 percent, $p < .05$), and prior housing dissatisfaction (37 percent compared to 11 percent, $p < .01$). Dissatisfied stayers are also less likely than satisfied stayers to be homeowners (32 percent own their home in the prior survey year compared to 41 percent of satisfied stayers, $p < .10$).

A slightly different set of factors distinguishes dissatisfied and satisfied movers. Among movers, there are more differences with respect to demographic and employment characteristics. Dissatisfied movers are more likely than satisfied movers to be African American (64 percent compared to 53 percent of satisfied movers, $p < .05$), and they are less likely to be married in the previous survey year (10 percent compared to 17 percent of satisfied movers, $p < .10$). Relative to respondents who are satisfied following a move, those who are dissatisfied report higher rates of job loss (21 percent compared to 11 percent of satisfied movers, $p < .01$) as well as human capital barriers (33 percent compared to 25 percent of satisfied movers, $p < .10$). Health problems are common for both groups of movers. Dissat-

isfied movers report higher rates of drug use (8 percent report use of hard drugs compared to 2 percent of satisfied movers, $p < .01$) and domestic violence (24 percent report violence between survey years compared to 16 percent of satisfied movers, $p < .05$). With the exception of differences in prior housing dissatisfaction, positive and negative movers do not differ significantly with respect to the incidence of housing and neighborhood problems experienced in the survey year preceding a move.

The next part of the analysis uses multivariate analyses to assess the extent to which each characteristic helps explain unique variation in the dependent variable. Table 2 presents regression coefficients and robust standard errors for a multinomial logistic regression of type of mobility on the set of individual and household characteristics. The columns show the relationship between mobility and the set of characteristics relative to a common alternative. In columns 1–3, the comparison group consists of satisfied stayers; in column 4, the comparison group consists of satisfied movers. The regression model controls for the number of months between survey years and prior housing satisfaction.

The first and second columns compare satisfied and dissatisfied movers to satisfied stayers. These columns show that younger age and previous dissatisfaction with housing increase the likelihood of being a dissatisfied mover or a satisfied mover relative to being a satisfied stayer. The first column shows that relative to satisfied stayers, dissatisfied movers are more likely to report a job loss between survey years, use hard drugs in the prior survey year, and have housing quality problems in the prior survey year. The second column shows that satisfied movers are less likely than the comparison group to be African American and more likely to have low educational attainment. For both negative and positive movers, homeownership and receipt of housing assistance decrease the likelihood of mobility, and mental health problems and domestic violence increase the likelihood of mobility, relative to those who do not move and are satisfied with their housing.

Columns 3 and 4 compare positive stayers with negative stayers and positive movers with negative movers. Column 3 shows the relationship between being a dissatisfied stayer and the set of independent variables, relative to being a satisfied stayer. Those who do not move and express dissatisfaction with their housing circumstances are younger, more likely to report problems with physical health, and more likely to report problems with housing quality, relative to those who are satisfied and do not move.

TABLE 2. Multinomial Logistic Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors for the Regression of Mobility on Individual and Household Attributes

	Dissatisfied Mover (Relative to Satisfied Stayer) (1)	Satisfied Mover (Relative to Satisfied Stayer) (2)	Dissatisfied Stayer (Relative to Satisfied Stayer) (3)	Dissatisfied Mover (Relative to Satisfied Mover) (4)
Life-cycle/demographic characteristics:				
Age	-.071*** (.019)	-.051*** (.012)	-.036** (.015)	-.020 (.018)
African American	.101 (.279)	-.374** (.170)	.007 (.249)	.474* (.250)
Married and living with spouse	-.413 (.386)	-.023 (.236)	.116 (.337)	-.390 (.387)
Cohabiting as unmarried partners	.032 (.301)	-.155 (.207)	-.079 (.291)	.186 (.286)
No. children in household	-.109 (.082)	-.058 (.067)	-.067 (.079)	-.051 (.082)
Constraints and risk factors:				
Percent of months worked between survey years	-.192 (.348)	.028 (.295)	-.076 (.319)	-.220 (.341)
Job loss between survey years	.794*** (.300)	.056 (.253)	-.006 (.357)	.738** (.300)
Low educational attainment (1997)	.332 (.281)	.350* (.185)	.056 (.272)	-.018 (.257)
Human capital barrier (1997)	.331 (.294)	-.030 (.201)	.119 (.282)	.362 (.266)
Owned home	-1.111*** (.304)	-1.563*** (.209)	-.382 (.270)	.452 (.307)

Received housing assistance	-.844** (.342)	-.888*** (.212)	-.184 (.295)	.044 (.329)
Poor physical health	-.134 (.256)	-.161 (.162)	.462** (.249)	.027 (.249)
Mental health problem	.540** (.255)	.411** (.168)	.236 (.231)	.129 (.252)
Hard drug use	.906* (.538)	-.452 (.525)	.258 (.631)	1.358** (.556)
Domestic violence	1.019*** (.320)	.618** (.259)	.345 (.353)	.402 (.278)
Housing and neighborhood problems:				
Housing affordability problem	.114 (.266)	.136 (.177)	-.020 (.258)	-.022 (.259)
Housing quality problem	.518** (.228)	.260 (.172)	.497** (.232)	.258 (.217)
Unsafe neighborhood	-.231 (.297)	-.013 (.212)	.057 (.275)	-.218 (.271)
Prior housing dissatisfaction (1999)	1.704*** (.282)	1.070*** (.215)	1.479*** (.279)	.634*** (.229)
Months between survey years	.217*** (.066)	.151*** (.043)	-.035 (.046)	.065 (.068)
Constant	-4.464*** (1.662)	-1.642 (1.051)	.224 (1.253)	-2.822* (1.692)

Source.—Women's Employment Study, 2001–3.

Note.—Number of observations = 1,079. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

* $p < .10$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$.

Column 4 shows the relationship between being a dissatisfied mover and the set of independent variables, relative to being a satisfied mover. This column shows that relative to those who move and are satisfied with their housing circumstances, those who move and are dissatisfied are more likely to be African American, to have experienced a job loss between survey years, and to report hard drug use.

Because the regression coefficients reveal the direction but not the magnitude of the relationship between independent and dependent variables, table 3 shows how the probability of mobility or staying in place changes for a respondent who experiences one of the problems that is significant in the regressions but is otherwise similar to the average respondent. The table compares the predicted probability of mobility to the baseline probability of mobility for a typical respondent who is not African American and reports mean (or mode, for dichotomous variables) demographic and household characteristics; no housing problems; no health problems, substance abuse, or domestic violence; no employment barriers; and satisfaction with housing in the previous survey year. The first row of data shows the baseline probability, and the remaining rows show the percentage point change in probability for each of the characteristics.

The first row of table 3 shows that for the typical respondent, the baseline probability of being a satisfied stayer is 43 percent; the probability of being a dissatisfied stayer is 6 percent; the probability of being a satisfied mover is 46 percent; and the probability of being a dissatisfied mover is 5 percent. With respect to life-cycle and demographic characteristics, older age decreases the probability of being a satisfied mover while increasing the probability of being a satisfied stayer, but it produces only small changes in the probability of being a dissatisfied mover or stayer. The probability of being a satisfied mover decreases by 9 percentage points when a respondent is African American.

Job loss increases the probability that a respondent will be a dissatisfied mover from 5 percent to 10 percent, while decreasing the probability of all other forms of mobility. Low educational attainment increases the probability of satisfied mobility by 8 percentage points and decreases the probability of satisfied stability by a comparable amount. Although dissatisfied stayers and movers were more likely than satisfied stayers to experience physical housing problems, having a physical housing problem increases the probability of being a dissatisfied stayer or a dissatisfied mover by 2 percentage points each.

TABLE 3. Predicted Probabilities for Positive and Negative Mobility

	Satisfied Stayer (%) (1)	Dissatisfied Stayer (%) (2)	Satisfied Mover (%) (3)	Dissatisfied Mover (%) (4)
Baseline predicted probability	43.3	5.9	46.0	4.8
Percentage point change in predicted probability:				
Life-cycle and demographic characteristics:				
Older age (age = 37)	4.9	-.2	-3.9	-.7
African American	6.9	1.0	-9.3	1.4
Constraints and risk factors:				
Job loss between survey years	-3.4	-.5	-1.1	5.0
Low educational attainment	-7.7	-.8	7.7	.7
Owned home	30.7	1.0	-29.5	-2.1
Receipt of housing assistance	19.3	1.2	-18.6	-1.8
Physical health problem	1.8	3.9	-5.2	-4
Mental health problem	-9.6	-.1	8.0	1.6
Hard drug use	3.7	2.4	-14.2	8.1
Domestic violence	-14.5	-.4	10.8	4.1
Housing and neighborhood problem:				
Housing quality problem	-7.5	2.2	3.4	1.9

Source.—Women's Employment Study, 2001–3.

Relationships between homeownership, housing assistance, and mobility are particularly large in magnitude. Being a homeowner, for example, increases the probability of being a satisfied stayer by 31 percentage points, and it decreases the probability of being a satisfied mover by 30 percentage points. Receipt of housing assistance leads to a 19 percentage point increase in the probability of being a satisfied stayer, and a 19 percentage point decrease in the probability of being a satisfied mover.

The results in table 3 suggest that personal and household characteristics lead to large changes in the probability of satisfied staying and moving and smaller changes in the probability of dissatisfied staying and moving. For example, older age and being African American increase the probability of being a satisfied stayer and decrease the probability of being a satisfied mover by comparable amounts, but the magnitude of the change in the probability for dissatisfied stayers and movers is small. The same pattern is observed for low educational attainment, homeownership, receipt of housing assistance, and mental health problems.

Yet there are some personal problems that generate larger changes in the probability of dissatisfied staying or moving, relative to the smaller changes

noted above. The second column shows that physical health problems and hard drug use increase the probability of being a dissatisfied stayer by 4 percentage points and 2 percentage points, respectively, representing two of the largest increases over the baseline probability for this category of mover. The fourth column shows that hard drug use leads to an increase over the baseline probability of dissatisfied mobility of 8 percentage points, from 5 percent to 13 percent. Finally, domestic violence increases the probability of mobility by 11 percentage points for satisfied movers and 4 percentage points for dissatisfied movers.

STABILITY AND INSTABILITY AMONG MOVERS AND NONMOVERS

The results reported above show that positive and negative nonmovers differ with respect to several demographic characteristics and personal and household problems. Most differences emerge between nonmovers and movers as a whole rather than between respondents who report dissatisfaction and those who report satisfaction with housing circumstances. While few individual characteristics distinguish dissatisfied from satisfied respondents in the multivariate analysis, it is possible that these respondents differ with respect to their mobility experiences. The final part of the analysis examines how positive and negative movers differ in the nature of their housing transitions, including transitions between renting and owning and in their satisfaction with housing.

Table 4 shows that with respect to housing instability, a minority of all WES respondents report evictions (7 percent), homeless episodes (5 percent), doubling-up to share expenses (18 percent), or frequent mobility (moving three or more times; 9 percent) between survey years (see col. 1 in table 4). Twenty-three percent of respondents reported experiencing one or more of these types of housing instability between survey years. The second and third columns show that few nonmovers experience instability and that the incidence of such problems is more pronounced among movers.

With respect to housing tenure, the first column of table 4 shows that 61 percent of WES respondents are steady renters, meaning that they rented their home in both the previous and current survey years. Twenty-two percent are steady owners, 10 percent transitioned from renting to owning, and 7 percent transitioned from owning to renting between survey years. As shown in columns 2 and 3, stayers are more likely than movers to be steady owners (36 percent of stayers owned their home in both years

TABLE 4. Incidence of Housing Instability, Housing Tenure Transitions, and Change in Housing Satisfaction, by Category of Mover

	All Respondents (100%) (1)	All Stayers (55.1%) (2)	All Movers (44.9%) (3)	Dissatisfied Stayers (23.4%) (4)	Satisfied Stayers (76.6%) (5)	Dissatisfied Movers (23.7%) (6)	Satisfied Movers (76.4%) (7)	p-Level
Housing instability (%):								
Eviction between survey years	7.4	.5	15.8	1.4	.2	24.6	13.1	***
Homeless episode between survey years	4.7	.2	10.2	.0	.0	13.6	9.2	***
Doubled-up to share expenses between survey years	18.0	2.0	37.7	2.8	1.7	53.4	32.8	***
Frequent mobility (3+ moves between years)	8.8	.0	19.7	NA	NA	28.0	17.1	***
One or more type of instability	22.8	2.5	47.7	3.5	2.1	61.9	43.3	***
Housing tenure transitions (%):								
Steady owner	21.9	35.6	5.0	30.1	37.3	2.5	5.8	*
Steady renter	60.9	56.5	66.3	64.3	54.2	73.7	64.1	***
Transition from renting to owning	10.2	4.9	16.6	3.5	5.3	7.6	19.4	***
Transition from owning to renting	7.0	2.9	12.0	2.1	3.2	16.1	10.8	***
Change in housing satisfaction (%):								
Steady housing satisfaction	62.9	69.1	55.2	NA	90.2	NA	72.4	***
Steady housing dissatisfaction	10.5	10.8	10.0	46.2	NA	42.7	NA	***
Transition from dissatisfied to satisfied	13.6	7.5	21.1	NA	9.8	NA	27.6	***
Transition from satisfied to dissatisfied	13.0	12.6	13.5	53.8	NA	57.3	NA	***
Observations	1,111	612	499	143	469	118	381	

Source.—Women's Employment Study, 2001–3.

Note.—The *p*-values denote the significance of a difference of means test between stayers and movers (col. 2), dissatisfied stayers and satisfied stayers (col. 3), and dissatisfied movers and satisfied movers (col. 4). NA = not applicable.

* *p* < .10.

** *p* < .05.

*** *p* < .01.

compared to 5 percent of movers, $p < .01$). Perhaps unsurprisingly, movers are more likely than stayers to experience a transition from renting to owning (17 percent of movers compared to 5 percent of stayers, $p < .01$) or from owning to renting (12 percent of movers compared to 3 percent of stayers, $p < .01$).⁹

A minority of respondents experienced changes in housing satisfaction between survey years. Column 1 of 4 shows that the majority of WES respondents (63 percent) remained satisfied with their housing arrangements across survey years. Columns 2 and 3 show that stayers are more likely than movers to report steady housing satisfaction (69 percent of stayers report steady satisfaction, as compared to 55 percent of movers, $p < .01$). These columns also show that while similar percentages of non-movers and movers report either continued dissatisfaction or deteriorating satisfaction, movers are much more likely than stayers to report improvements in housing satisfaction: 21 percent of movers transitioned from dissatisfaction to satisfaction following a move, as compared to 8 percent of stayers ($p < .01$).

Columns 6 and 7 of table 4 show that despite limited differences with respect to individual and household characteristics, dissatisfied movers differ from satisfied movers with respect to both housing instability and housing tenure transitions. Relative to those who move and are satisfied with their housing circumstances, those who report dissatisfaction following a move are considerably more likely to experience an eviction (25 percent of dissatisfied movers compared to 13 percent of satisfied movers), a doubling-up episode (53 percent compared to 33 percent), or frequent moves (28 percent compared to 17 percent; all differences significant at $p < .01$). Satisfied movers are more likely than dissatisfied movers to transition from renting to owning their home (19 percent transitioned into homeownership, compared to 8 percent of dissatisfied movers, $p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

The WES data reveal high rates of residential mobility among low-income mothers between the 2 final years of the panel study. While levels of mobility

9. Small percentages of stayers transition from renting to owning, or from owning to renting, without experiencing a move. This may reflect rent-to-own housing arrangements or the transfer of a home mortgage between family members within a single household.

among WES respondents are slightly lower than those found in other studies during the same period (Bloom et al. 2000, 2002), close to half of WES families moved between survey years. The analysis provides evidence of positive residential circumstances among both nonmovers and movers; just over three-quarters of nonmovers and movers reported satisfaction with their current housing situation. A majority of respondents were satisfied with their housing in both survey years. In addition, one-fifth of respondents owned their home in both survey years, and 10 percent transitioned from renting to owning between survey years.

While there is evidence of positive residential transitions, the data also provide evidence of negative transitions. Nearly one-quarter of all movers report dissatisfaction following a move, and a comparable proportion of stayers report dissatisfaction in the absence of a move. Experiences of instability are common among movers. In contrast to previous research, fewer WES respondents experienced negative forms of mobility, as measured by housing dissatisfaction following a move. For example, while nearly 50 percent of movers in the Making Connections study are categorized as churning movers who report low incomes and experience few gains in housing or neighborhood quality following a move, just 24 percent of those who move in the WES are categorized as dissatisfied movers. This difference may stem in part from the fact that the Making Connections study used both objective and subjective measures to define groups of movers. Given that many WES respondents experience problems related to housing affordability and quality, it is likely that using such characteristics to define groups of movers would lead to a larger percentage of negative movers in the WES.

Several characteristics distinguish WES respondents who move from respondents who do not move. The multivariate analysis shows that relative to those who do not move and report satisfaction with their housing circumstances, those who experience positive and negative moves are younger and more likely to be homeowners. Young age and homeownership also distinguish movers and nonmovers in the general population. In the WES, movers are also more likely to experience such problems as low educational attainment, mental health problems, and domestic violence.

Movers are also less likely to report receipt of housing assistance. Housing assistance sharply increases the probability that a respondent will report satisfaction in the absence of a move. This suggests that housing assistance may play a role in helping families remain in satisfactory hous-

ing arrangements. Housing assistance also decreases the probability of mobility, and the magnitude of the decrease is quite large for satisfied movers (19 percentage point change). Such findings are consistent with existing research that finds housing assistance is associated with decreased mobility over time (Wood et al. 2008). The fact that housing assistance decreases the probability of both satisfied and dissatisfied mobility may reflect the fact that housing assistance creates incentives and provides the resources needed for satisfied respondents to stay in place, and this choice may be more constrained for those who do not receive assistance. Alternatively, housing assistance may be acting as a proxy for unmeasured characteristics of respondents, such as individual motivation or a personal taste for changing housing circumstances.

Relative to the differences between nonmovers and movers, fewer characteristics distinguish positive and negative movers and nonmovers. African American race, job loss, and hard drug use are the only characteristics that distinguish negative movers from positive movers in a multivariate framework. While the probability that a respondent will experience a negative move is relatively small, job loss and hard drug use more than double the probability that a respondent will experience this type of move (from 5 percent to 10 percent for job loss and from 5 percent to 13 percent for hard drug use). The significant association between job loss and negative mobility also raises the possibility that negative forms of mobility may have become more pronounced in recent years due to the recession and high levels of unemployment within low-income communities. A slightly different set of characteristics distinguishes stayers from one another. Negative stayers are younger than positive stayers, and they are statistically significantly more likely to experience a physical health problem and poor-quality housing. In particular, the relationship between physical health problems and being a dissatisfied stayer is large and statistically significant. While future research is necessary to assess causal relationships, this suggests that physical health problems may play a role in shaping patterns of mobility among low-income families.

Finally, the data show that positive and negative movers differ with respect to their experiences of housing instability as well as transitions between renting and owning. Dissatisfied movers are significantly more likely to experience housing instability in the form of evictions, doubling-up, and frequent mobility. Satisfied movers are also significantly more likely to transition into homeownership between survey years.

There are several limitations of the current study. First, the data used in this study are drawn from a single sample of low-income mothers in Michigan. It is possible that the relationships identified in this analysis differ for other regional or national samples. While past analyses find that the WES sample compares favorably to national samples with respect to basic demographic characteristics (Seefeldt and Orzel 2005), WES respondents face lower housing costs and affordability problems than many low-income families nationwide. It is likely that the findings of this analysis are most generalizable for families living in urban areas with similar rates of affordability. In higher-cost areas, housing problems related to affordability and quality may emerge as more powerful predictors of both positive and negative forms of mobility.

Second, although the current analysis controls for multiple observed forms of heterogeneity among respondents, some differences remain unobserved. It is possible that these unobserved forms of heterogeneity affect whether respondents experience positive and negative moves, thereby biasing the estimated coefficients. The nature of the WES panel data does permit the inclusion of respondent fixed effects, which would control for unobserved differences between respondents. However, fixed effects were not included for the following reasons.

To estimate model parameters, fixed effects models use information from respondents who experience a change in the dependent and independent variables, but they do not use information from respondents for whom the dependent variable does not change or from independent variables that do not vary over time. In the WES, many respondents do not experience a change in the dependent variable, making statistical significance harder to assess. Omitting time-invariant variables is also problematic, because it is likely that a respondent's likelihood of experiencing a positive or negative move is influenced both by characteristics that change over time, such as health problems, as well as those that do not change over time, such as race. Little is known about the characteristics that distinguish positive and negative nonmovers and movers, and therefore a modeling approach capable of identifying systematic differences in both the stable and time-varying characteristics of groups of movers was preferred. However, the modeling approach is not capable of controlling for unobserved forms of heterogeneity. Therefore, although the analysis provides descriptive insights regarding the correlates of residential mobility, these relationships should not be interpreted as causal.

CONCLUSION

This article fills a gap in the literature by examining an important and underexplored indicator of well-being among families in the post-welfare reform era, housing stability and satisfaction. The analysis shows that considerable heterogeneity exists between groups of movers and stayers and, to a lesser extent, within such groups. In the WES, most movers and stayers reported satisfaction rather than dissatisfaction with current housing circumstances. Yet experiences of instability are prevalent among those who experience mobility. While the incidence of evictions, homeless episodes, doubling-up, and frequent mobility is low when such experiences are considered individually, when they are grouped together it is clear that a large number of low-income families experience such problems.

Furthermore, slightly less than one-quarter of respondents reported dissatisfaction with housing circumstances following a move, suggesting that mobility may be problematic for a nontrivial number of families. The analysis also indicates that a subset of low-income families do not move despite being dissatisfied with their housing circumstances. The inability to move out of poor-quality housing or neighborhoods is a policy problem that deserves attention, particularly given the fact that families who are constrained in their mobility may be less likely to come into contact with agencies that provide assistance locating affordable and adequate quality housing.

In the analysis, homeownership and housing assistance sharply increase the probability that a respondent will report satisfaction in the absence of a move. These characteristics help distinguish those respondents who move from those who do not move. While it is not possible to rule out the possibility that homeownership and housing assistance are acting as proxies for unmeasured characteristics of respondents, the finding that housing assistance is associated with satisfaction in the absence of a move suggests that housing assistance helps families remain in housing that is considered satisfactory.

Finally, the analysis identifies a small set of factors that distinguish families at risk of experiencing a negative move or at risk of remaining in housing that is considered unsatisfactory. Respondents who report dissatisfaction have higher levels of physical health problems relative to those who report satisfaction. The high level of physical health problems among this population is noteworthy, and future research might investigate the causal relationship between health problems and movement into or out of poor-

quality housing or neighborhoods. Strong relationships also exist between job interruptions and housing mobility. From a policy perspective, this suggests that those in unstable employment situations may be at higher risk for experiencing negative mobility, and they may have greater need for short-term housing assistance to address the consequences of employment interruptions. Understanding when and why low-income families move and do not move is critical for improving policies that promote positive residential transitions while protecting against negative forms of mobility.

APPENDIX A

TABLE A1. Dependent and Independent Variables, Descriptions and Means/Proportions

	Question Content	Mean/ Percent
Dependent variable:		
Dissatisfied stayer	Respondent did not move between survey years and was "somewhat dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with housing situation in current survey year (measured in year <i>t</i>)	12.9
Satisfied stayer	Respondent did not move between survey years and was "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" with housing situation in current survey year (measured in year <i>t</i>)	42.2
Satisfied mover	Respondent moved between survey years and was "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with housing situation in current survey year (measured in year <i>t</i>)	34.3
Dissatisfied mover	Respondent moved between survey years and was "very dissatisfied" or "somewhat dissatisfied" with housing situation in current survey year (measured in year <i>t</i>)	10.6
Life-cycle and demographic characteristics:		
Age	Respondent age in previous survey year (mean age)	33.1
African American	Respondent is African American (measured in 1997)	55.0
Married and living with spouse	Married and living with spouse in previous survey year	18.0
Cohabiting as unmarried partners	Cohabiting as unmarried partners in previous survey year	20.7
Number of children in household	Number of care-given children in household in previous survey year	2.2
Personal constraints and risk factors:		
Percent of months worked between survey years	Percentage of months worked by respondent between survey years (measured in year <i>t</i>)	69.6

TABLE A1. (continued)

Question Content		Mean/ Percent
Job loss between survey years	Respondent reported loss of job between survey years (measured in year <i>t</i>)	11.2
Low educational attainment	Less than a high school education (measured in 1997)	30.2
Human capital barrier	Low work experience (worked fewer than 20% of years since age 18) or skills (knows fewer than four of nine job skills) (measured in 1997)	26.3
Received housing assistance	Respondent answered "yes" to the following question in the previous survey year: Do you have to report the household's income to someone every year so they can set the rent?	17.9
Owned home	Respondent owned home in previous survey year	29.0
Poor physical health	Respondent met age-specific physical limitation or self-reported fair/poor health in the previous survey year	53.7
Mental health problem	Respondent met diagnostic screening criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, social phobia, or generalized anxiety disorder in the previous survey year	33.2
Hard drug use	Respondent reported use of cocaine, crack, stimulants, heroin, or other hard drugs in the previous survey year	3.0
Domestic violence	Respondent reported severe abuse between survey years (measured in year <i>t</i>)	12.9
Housing/neighborhood problems:		
Housing affordability problem	Respondent's self-reported monthly housing costs divided by gross monthly household income is greater than 30% in the previous survey year	27.8
Housing quality problem	Respondent reported at least two of the following six problems in the previous survey year: a leaky roof or ceiling; a toilet, hot-water heater, or other plumbing that does not work right; rats, mice, roaches, or other insects; broken windows; a heating system that does not work properly; and exposed wires or other electrical problems	37.7
Unsafe neighborhood	Respondent reported living in an "unsafe" or "very unsafe" neighborhood in the previous survey year	20.3
Prior housing dissatisfaction	Respondent reported being "very dissatisfied" or "somewhat dissatisfied" with housing situation (measured in 1999)	23.0
Months between survey years	Total number of months between survey interviews (measured in year <i>t</i> ; mean)	23.1

Source.—Women's Employment Study, 2001–3.

Note.—Total person-year observations = 1,111. Unless otherwise indicated, figures in the right-hand column are percentages.

NOTE

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